

**“THE ANCHOR OF THE SOUL THAT ENTERS
WITHIN THE VEIL”: THE ASCENSION OF
THE “SON” IN THE LETTER TO
THE HEBREWS**

Name of researcher: Felix Cortez
Name of faculty adviser: Jon Paulien, Ph.D.
Date completed: March 2008

Problem

This dissertation studies the nature of Jesus’ ascension to heaven and the role of the ascension in the argument of Hebrews.

Method

The methodology of this dissertation consists of an analysis of those passages in which Jesus’ ascension is referred to directly (Heb 1:6; 4:14-16; 6:19-20; 9:11-14; 10:19-22) and a study of the imagery Hebrews uses to couch its theology, giving special attention to the role of this imagery in the progression of the argument. The study is both exegetical and theological in nature, seeking to provide an analysis of specific passages as well as systematization of their import.

Results

The six passages that refer explicitly to Jesus’ ascension in Hebrews (1:6; 4:14-16; 6:19-20; 9:11-14; 10:19-22) associate the ascension with different aspects of Jesus’ achievements. Hebrews 1:6 relates the ascension with Jesus’ enthronement (also 4:14-16); 6:19-20, with his appointment as high priest; and 9:11-14, 24 and 10:19-22, with the inauguration of the new covenant. All of these events form part of Jesus’ exaltation at the right hand of God (1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2) and contribute to his identity as “Son.”

These achievements of Jesus have an intriguing similarity to the achievements of righteous Davidic kings in the Hebrew Bible: after ascending the throne, the righteous Davidic king would (1) renew the covenant between God and the nation, (2) cleanse the land, (3) build or repair the temple, (4) reform the cult and reorganize the priests and Levites, (5) promote the reunification of Israel, and (6) achieve rest by defeating the enemies. Finally, the rise to power of the Davidic king often coincides with (7) the emergence of a faithful priest. The Hebrew prophets and those early Jewish documents that continue to hold fast to a Davidic hope project these achievements into the future and elevate them to an eschatological dimension.

Hebrews argues that Jesus fulfilled these expectations: Jesus is the “son” enthroned at the right hand of God (1:3, 5-6), he has defeated “death,” the enemy (2:14-16), built the “house of God” (3:1-6; 8:1-5), and provided “rest” for his people (4:1-10). His ascension to the throne implies as well the emergence of a new faithful priest of the order of Melchizedek (chaps. 5-7) and a reformation of the cult—specifically of the law of sacrifices (9:24-10:18) and priesthood (7:13-28). The new king cleanses his people (9:11-

14), mediates a new covenant (9:15-23), and reforms the cult by establishing one sacrifice that is effective “once for all” (9:24–10:18) and multiple spiritual sacrifices (13:10-16), all of which conclude in a joyous celebration at Mount Zion (12:22-29)—as the reforms of ancient Jewish kings did.

In other words, the study suggests that Hebrews conceives the ascension as the inauguration of Jesus’ office as “Son” at the “right hand of God” (Heb 1:3, 13; 4:14-16; 8:1-2; 10:12-13; 12:1-2) and that it understands the title “Son” as the fulfillment of the promise made to David (2 Sam 7:12-15), which is claimed for Jesus explicitly in Heb 1:5.

Chapter 1 states the problem and analyzes the two answers that have been offered in scholarly literature (the Day of Atonement and the Inauguration of the Sanctuary as typologies or analogies to Jesus’ ascension). It also introduces the delimitations and methodology of the study. Chapter 2 presents the findings regarding the expectations of the rule of righteous Davidic kings both in the Hebrew Bible and early Jewish documents. Chapter 3 analyzes the ascension passages in Hebrews and their relationship to the fulfillment of the expectations regarding a future righteous Davidic king. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study.

Conclusion

Davidic traditions function as an essential subtext of Hebrews and provide the necessary force to its hortatory argument. The author of Hebrews argues that Jesus’ exaltation in heaven as the eschatological Davidic king brings about the fulfillment of God’s promises of his people: entrance into the rest, an intercessor, cleansing from sin, and the restoration of the covenant. On the other hand, Jesus’ exaltation also demands their allegiance to him; otherwise, they will suffer the judgment of God. He exhorts them, then, to “hold fast the confession” so they may inherit the promises of God.